

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 PHNOM 02615 111126Z

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ACTION SS-25

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O 111010Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

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S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 2615

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, MASS, MMOL, CB, US

SUBJ: AMMUNITION RESUPPLY PROBLEM GROWING MORE CRITICAL DAILY

REF: PHNOM PENH 2564

1. PARAGRAPHS BELOW, PREPARED BY CHMEDTC AT MY REQUEST, GIVE FURTHER DETAILS AND JUSTIFICATION SUPPORTING OUR RECOMMENDATION SET FORTH REFTEL FOR AN AUGMENTED EMERGENCY AIRLIFT INTO POCHENTONG OF UP TO 40 SORTIES PER DAY COMMENCING 13 FEB. AT THE LATEST.

2. BASED ON JANUARY, 1975 CONSUMPTION EXPERIENCE, ON 10 FEB, THERE WAS AN AVERAGE OF 13 DAYS OF SUPPLY OF GROUND AND AIR MUNITIONS ON HAND IN THE PHNOM PENH AREA. THE FOLLOWING AMMUNITION ITEMS ARE NOW AT OR BELOW THE CRITICAL STOCKAGE LEVEL OF 15 DAYS OF SUPPLY USING THE SAME JANUARY EXPERIENCE FACTOR:

ITEM	DAYS OF SUPPLY
5.56MM FOR M16 RIFLE	12
40MM FOR M-79 GRENADE LAUNCHER	15
60MM HE FOR MORTAR	14
81MM HE FOR MORTAR	10
105MM HE FOR HOWITZER	12
155MM PROPELLENT CHARGE FOR HOWITZER	11

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 PHNOM 02615 111126Z

FUSE FOR HOWITZER 15

HAND GRENADE	13
ANTI-PERSONNEL BOMB	4
FIRE BOMB	4

3. THE MINIMUM COUNTRY-WIDE REQUIREMENT TO SUSTAIN THE INTENSIFIED COMBAT EXPERIENCED THIS DRY SEASON IS 600 TONS OF MUNITIONS PER DAY. OF THIS TOTAL, 540 TONS (36 C-130 SORTIES, FOR EXAMPLE) MUST BE AIRLANDED AT POCHENTONG, THE REMAINDER BEING DELIVERED BY SURFACE MEANS TO KOMPONG SOM AND BATTAMBANG/SIEM REAP. AN ADDITIONAL 60 TONS (4 C-130 SORTIES) OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS AND GENERAL CARGO (MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND REPAIR PARTS) ARE ALSO REQUIRED HERE TO SUPPORT COMBAT OPERATIONS. RESUPPLY AT THESE RATES WILL MERELY SUSTAIN EXPENDITURES FOR ONGOING OPERATIONS. THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY TO REPLENISH STOCKAGE LEVELS TO OFFSET THE SEVERE DRAWDOWN WHICH HAS TAKEN PLACE SINCE THE 1 JAN. ONSET OF THE KC DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE. BIRD AIR CONTRACT OF 10 C-130 SORTIES PER DAY (9 AMMUNITION AND ONE GENERAL CARGO) ONLY MEETS 25 PERCENT OF CURRENT DAILY CONSUMPTION. PLANNED EXPANSION OF THE BIRD CONTRACT TO 20 SORTIES PER DAY (18 AMMUNITION AND 2 GENERAL CARGO), HOPEFULLY BY 20 FEB 1975, WILL THEREFORE PROVIDE ONLY 50 PERCENT REPLACEMENT OF MUNITIONS CONSUMPTION. AT THIS RATE OF DEFICIT RESUPPLY, ON 2 MARCH THERE WILL BE LESS THAN ONE DAY OF MUNITIONS REMAINING IN-COUNTRY.

4. HOWEVER, THE MARKED INCREASE IN ENEMY ACTIVITY AROUND PHNOM PENH STRONGLY INDICATES THE ONSET OF PHASE TWO OF THE KC DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE. CONSUMPTION RATES FOR PHNOM PENH WILL PROBABLY CLIMB, AS THEY DID DURING SOME PERIODS OF JANUARY, TO 700 TONS OR MORE PER DAY. THAT EVENTUALITY, COUPLED WITH DRAMATIC INCREASES IN AIR AND ARTILLERY SUPPORT TO REOPEN THE LOWER MEKONG, WILL FURTHER DRAIN PHNOM PENH STOCKS. FOR EXAMPLE, GIVEN THE CURRENT LIMITED RATE OF RESUPPLY AND THESE INCREASES IN CONSUMPTION, ON 16 FEB. THERE WOULD BE ONLY TWELVE DAYS OF SMALL ARMS, EIGHT DAYS OF MORTAR AND SIX DAYS OF 105MM HOWITZER AMMUNITION ON HAND IN PHNOM PENH. THERE WOULD BE NO ANTIPERSONNEL

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 PHNOM 02615 111126Z

BOMBS REMAINING. IT IS THEREFORE URGENT THAT THIS AIR-LAND AUGMENTATION BEGIN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND NOT LATER THAN 13 FEB. AT THE OUTSIDE.

5. AIRFIELD SECURITY IS ASSURED BY AN ADEQUATELY MANNED KHMER AIR FORCE DEFENSE UNIT USING PERIMETER INDUSTRIAL SECURITY FENCE, FLOOD LIGHTING AND AN EXTENSIVE SYSTEM OF BUNKERED MACHINE-GUN POSITIONS. CHANCES OF ANY

DAYTIME SAPPER ATTACKS ARE REMOTE. SINCE POCHENTONG AIRFIELD LIES WELL WITHIN THE PHNOM PENH SPECIAL MILITARY REGION, ITS DEFENSE IS INTEGRATED INTO THE OVERALL GROUND SECURITY PLAN FOR THE PHNOM PENH PERIMETER. ITS IMPORTANCE IS UNDERSTOOD BY FANK COMMANDERS AND STAFF, AND APPROPRIATE PRIORITY OF EFFORT IS GIVEN TO ITS DEFENSE. THE ENEMY MAY BE EXPECTED TO CONTINUE INTERMITTENT SURREPTITIOUS INDIRECT FIRE ATTACKS ON THE BASE, BUT THE KHMER ARMY AND AIR FORCE HAVE DEMONSTRATED THE COMPETENCE AND WILL TO RESPOND, THEREBY MINIMIZING THE IMPACT OF THIS THREAT.

6. POCHENTONG HAS A 8900 X 130 FOOT RUNWAY. IT IS LIMITED TO DAYLIGHT HOURS, VFR OPERATIONS ONLY. THERE ARE ADEQUATE AIR AND GROUND TRAFFIC CONTROL, PARKING FACILITIES, OFFLOAD CAPACITY, AND AMPLE THROUGHPUT CAPABILITY TO ACCOMMODATE THE LEVEL OF ACTIVITY ANTICIPATED IN THIS AERIAL RESUPPLY EFFORT. RESUPPLY AIRCRAFT WILL BE ACCORDED PRIORITY DEPARTURE IN THE EVENT OF ANY EMERGENCY. AIRCRAFT WITH A FOOTPRINT PRESSURE IN EXCESS OF THE C-130 MAY BE RESTRICTED TO THE CONCRETE AREA IN FRONT OF THE CIVILIAN TERMINAL AND OUTSIZED AIRCRAFT OF THE 747 VARIETY WOULD EXPERIENCE DIFFICULTIES IN TAXIING, ALONG WITH EXCESSIVE OFFLOAD TIMES WHICH WOULD OBVIATE THEIR USE. IN SUM, THERE ARE FEW INSURMOUNTABLE TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES INVOLVED.

7. FURTHER COMPLICATING THIS BLEAK AMMUNITION PICTURE IS THE HUMAN FACTOR--THE PRESENTLY HIGHLY-MOTIVATED FANK COMMAND STRUCTURE COULD BE EXPECTED TO CRACK AS AMMUNITION SUPPLIES DECLINE TO PRECARIOUSLY LOW LEVELS WITH REGULARLY SCHEDULED CONVOYS NOT YET ATTAINED. AS WAS PROVED BY RIVER CONVOY TP-111 LAST MONTH, ARRIVAL

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 PHNOM 02615 111126Z

OF THE FIRST ELEMENTS OF A MAJOR RESUPPLY EFFORT IN THIS BESIEGED CAPITAL CAN HAVE A POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT AT LEAST EQUAL TO ITS INTRINSIC EFFECT ON STOCKAGE LEVELS. SUCH A BOOST WOULD BE DOUBLY IMPORTANT IF, IN FACT, THE ENEMY HAS LAUNCHED THE SECOND PHASE OF HIS DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE, AND ALL AVAILABLE CURRENT INFORMATION INDICATES THAT HE SURELY HAS. FINALLY, THIS AERIAL RESUPPLY SURGE MIGHT WELL BE HELD TO A MINIMUM NUMBER OF DAYS SINCE IT COULD PROVIDE THE NECESSARY MIX OF MORALE AND MATERIAL STIFFENING FOR FANK TO SUCCEED IN THE MOMENTOUS TASK OF FORCING RIVER CONVOYS TP-114 AND TP-115 THROUGH THE LOWER MEKONG GAUNTLET TO PHNOM PENH.

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